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A Persian Influence on the Greeks?

In the latter half of the sixth century B.C. parts of the Greek world came under the control of Achaemenid Persia through its conquests, such as the Greek cities of Asia Minor in 545.[1] As David Frank Graf has noted, this marked the beginning of political relations between the Persian and Greek civilisations.[2] More generally, Cyrus' conquests also marked the beginning of contacts between the cultures of Greece and Persia. Walter Burkert has related that one result of this meeting of cultures was Greek influence upon the Persians' culture.[3] Indeed, this would not be that striking if there is any truth whatsoever in Herodotus' account of the receptiveness of the Persians to foreign cultures.[4] However, given the dominant position of Persia at the outset of their relations with the Greeks, one should also expect there to have been Persian cultural influence upon the Greeks.[5] Such expectations do not seem to be misplaced, for within the sphere of religion there was indeed Persian influence on the Greeks. Besides a few instances of both definite and possible Persian influence on matters within the domain of what might usually be considered Greek religiosity, the most interesting cases of the probable influence of Achaemenid religion involve its relation to Presocratic philosophy. Although Presocratic philosophy may not be considered a field within the domain of ancient Greek religion by all, it may nonetheless be useful if not essential to study certain Presocratics in terms of their relation to Greek religion. For instance, Peter Kingsley has asserted that Presocratics such as Pythagoras and Empedocles are best understood when not approached simply as 'philosophers;' he suggests that mysticism, magic, mythology, and other such domains associated more with religion than philosophy must nonetheless be considered in the study of Presocratic philosophy for it to be successful.[6] This point will not be argued here. For the sake of this study, Presocratic philosophy will be considered to be within the domain of Greek religion.

Ab initio, the study of the influence of Achaemenid religion upon anything whatsoever presents certain difficulties. This is due to the fact that there has been considerable scholarly controversy over the matter of what Achaemenid religion was. For instance, much debate concerns the question of whether the Achaemenids, particularly the early Achaemenids up to and including Xerxes, were Zoroastrians. Knowing that the Achaemenids were Zoroastrians would not only allow one to define Achaemenid religion as 'Zoroastrian' but also allow one to understand their religious practices within a Zoroastrian framework. This in turn raises basic questions about Zoroastrianism itself, such as the role of Ahura Mazda in Zoroaster's system compared to his role in pre-Zoroastrian Iranian religion, the role of the Magi in Zoroastrianism and the Achaemenid court, the possibility of the existence of an 'orthodox' variety of Zoroastrianism from which the Achaemenids might deviate, and the use of later texts to study the Zoroastrian beliefs and practices of earlier times. Such questions are relevant to this discus-

[1] David Frank Graf, Medism: Greek Collaboration with Achaemenid Persia (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1979), 56.
[2] *Ibid*., 57.
[3] Walter Burkert, Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2004), 99-100.
[4] *Ibid*., 33-42.
[5] Burkert, 100.
[6] Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (London, England, 1995), 217; *Ibid*., "Meetings with Magi: Iranian Themes among the Greeks, from Xanthus of Lydia to Plato's Academy," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 3rd ser., 5, no. 2 (July, 1995) : 187.

sion because it is essential to define Zoroastrianism in order to understand whether Achaemenid religion was Zoroastrian, and to understand the implications of Achaemenid religion being Zoroastrian. Specifically, if Achaemenid religion was Zoroastrian, this would mean that the question of Achaemenid religious influence on Presocratic philosophy is the question of Zoroastrian religious influence on Presocratic philosophy; knowing this would clarify what kind of influences might be expected and explain what kinds of influences might be manifest.

In examining the question of whether the textual sources of Zoroastrianism represent a single Zoroastrian tradition, Albert de Jong identifies three basic approaches in the scholarship concerned: the fragmentising, the harmonising, and the diversifying.[7] The fragmentising approach is characterised by its focus on the Gathas as the only 'true' texts of Zoroaster, and any additional textual references made by fragmentising scholars come from the linguistically similar Vedic texts instead of later 'Zoroastrian' ones; since the various texts are understood to be the products of essentially different religions in different cultural contexts, the notion of a single Zoroastrian tradition is rejected within the fragmentising approach.[8] The harmonising approach is the opposite of this, for it considers all the Zoroastrian texts to be representative of a single tradition which has simply changed organically through time but maintained its essential core; the Gathas, Younger Avesta, and Pahlavi texts are all products of the Zoroastrian tradition from the harmonising perspective.[9] Jong criticises the fragmentising approach for its assumption that Vedic texts, which are closest linguistically to the Gathas, are also closer to them in content than later Zoroastrian texts; he criticises the harmonising approach for its failure to recognise that there is no actual evidence for an unchanging core of Zoroastrian teachings, for there are fundamental doctrines in later Zoroastrianism which cannot be shown to have existed in earlier Zoroastrianism.[10] Instead he advocates a 'diversifying' approach based on a less 'narrow' definition of Zoroastrianism than those used in the other two approaches, one which recognises Zoroastrianism as "a variegated, elastic tradition rather than a strict doctrinal system," lacking a concept of heterodoxy.[11] However, it should be noted that this middling approach still recognises something of an unchanging core of Zoroastrian doctrine, for Jong states that the recognition of Ahura Mazda as the Creator was probably Zoroaster's innovation and that its denial would result in a belief that would be difficult to consider Zoroastrian.[12] Since many of the questions about Achaemenid religion mentioned above have been addressed in ways that can be related to Jong's three approaches, this framework will be applied in the subsequent discussion of these questions, where relevant.

One scholar to examine the question of the whether or not the Achaemenids were Zoroastrians, and the implications of this possibility, was Vassili Vassiliévitch Strouvé. Strouvé considers the possibility that one of Xerxes' inscriptions demonstrates his adherence to Zoroastrianism through its reference to his prohibition of the worship of the daevas and replacement of their worship with that of

[7] Albert de Jong, Traditions of the Magi: Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin Literature (Leiden, Netherlands, 1997), 43.
[8] *Ibid*., 44-45.
[9] *Ibid*., 49-50.
[10] *Ibid*., 59-60.
[11] *Ibid*., 61-63.
[12] *Ibid*., 62.

Ahura Mazda.[13] He notes other behaviours of Xerxes which conform to Zoroastrian standards as well, such as his apparent failure to build temples to replace the destroyed temples of the daevas.[14] However, Strouvé argues that despite their apparent adherence to Zoroastrianism, neither Xerxes nor the Magi were true Zoroastrians.[15] The very phrasing of this argument shows that he is using one of the 'narrow' definitions of Zoroastrianism criticised by Jong, for in distancing Xerxes from 'true' Zoroastrianism, Strouvé presupposes the existence of an orthodox variety of Zoroastrianism in the Achaemenid era. Considering the early Achaemenids in general, Strouvé notes that it is unusual that such monarchs, who appear to comply with Zoroastrian standards quite well, do not feature in the Avestas.[16] His explanation for this is that the writers of the Avestas were hostile to Darius and Xerxes for failing to be 'true followers' of Zoroaster, for these rulers never mentioned Zoroaster in their inscriptions, even in longer ones where it would have been appropriate, and furthermore they usurped Zoroaster's role as the mediator between Ahura Mazda and his people.[17]

Strouvé can be readily criticised for this argument. For instance, he claims that "in [the Achaemenid religion of Darius and Xerxes] there was no place for [Zoroaster] the prophet, since Xerxes named himself Saoshyant."[18] This is a nonsensical assertion, for the Saoshyant of Zoroastrianism is both closely associated with Zoroaster and yet a different person who, like Zoroaster, mediates between Ahura Mazda and humanity.[19] Therefore, if Xerxes considered himself to be the Saoshyant he would in no way be displacing Zoroaster from his role in Zoroastrianism, he would in fact appear to be associating himself with Zoroaster and his cause in a positive way. It should be noted that Strouvé is aware of the fact that Xerxes' 'Saoshyant Mission' appears to associate him with Zoroastrianism, but he maintains that this need only actually associate him with the ancient god Ahura Mazda and not Zoroaster as well; he considers the apparent similarity between Achaemenid religion and Zoroastrianism to simply be due to their common origin, from which Zoroaster had in fact created a new movement in the context of class-conflict and imperialism during early Achaemenid era.[20] That Strouvé is writing as a 'Soviet historiographer,' as he stated at the beginning of his article, is also revealed by this peculiar conception of Zoroaster.[21] As for the argument that it is significant that Darius and Xerxes make no mention of Zoroaster, Jong has rightly noted that such arguments are quite weak, given that there are only a tiny number of extant inscriptions and, perhaps most significantly, that even the Zoroastrian Sassanids make no reference to Zoroaster in their surviving inscriptions either.[22] Therefore, Strouvé's arguments that Achaemenid religion was not Zoroastrian will not be accepted here.

Another scholar who addressed the question of Achaemenid religion and its relation to Zoroas-

[13] Vassili Vassiliévitch Strouvé, "The Religion of the Achaemenides and Zoroastrianism," Cahiers d'histoire mondiale 5, no. 3 (1960) : 529.
[14] *Ibid*., 531-532.
[15] *Ibid*., 533.
[16] *Ibid*., 537.
[17] *Ibid*., 538-541.
[18] *Ibid*., 538.
[19] Mary Boyce, Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices (London, England, 1984), 42.
[20] Strouvé, 535-537, 543-545.
[21] *Ibid*., 531.
[22] Jong, 41-42, n. 6.

trianism, one concerned directly with the influence of Persian religion on Presocratic philosophy, was Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin.[23] In *The Western Response to Zoroaster*, he reappraises his past arguments that the Achaemenids were not Zoroastrians on account of having recently accepted Barr and Tavadia's arguments that Ahura Mazda was a god introduced by Zoroaster, not an ancient Iranian god as Duchesne-Guillemin himself once thought and as Strouvé claimed.[24] The first of these reappraisals concerns his argument that Herodotus' account of Persian religion does not appear to be of Zoroastrianism, which he now rejects because Herodotus may simply be describing non-official, and therefore non-Achaemenid, popular religious practices.[25] Although his rejection of this argument would seem to be valid, he seems to be making this rejection for the wrong reason. Much of Herodotus' description of Persian religion specifically concerns the Magi, whom he clearly places both in the court of Xerxes and in his retinue during the campaign against the Greeks.[26] Scholars such as Strouvé have suggested that in the Achaemenid era the Magi served as the priests of Achaemenid religion, although this has been dubiously argued on the evidence of the absence of the Magi from the Avestas, for in their promotion of Achaemenid religion the Magi too did not acknowledge Zoroaster, angering the writers of the Avestas.[27] However, if Herodotus is to be trusted it would seem that the Magi served at least Xerxes in a religious capacity. If so, this means that the rites which Herodotus describes as characteristic of the Magi are not necessarily to be understood as popular religious practices unrelated to the Achaemenids. Furthermore, many of these rites do in fact appear to be Zoroastrian. For instance, Jong has noted that Herodotus' description of the Magian custom of killing 'ants, snakes, and the other creeping and flying creatures' appears to be a description of Zoroastrian '*khrafstra*-killing,' meaning not only that the Magi appear to be Zoroastrians in this passage, but also that Herodotus appears to be describing Zoroastrianism in his account of Persian religion.[28]

Space does not allow for the rest of Duchesne-Guillemin's reappraisal of his arguments to be examined in such detail, but a few more should be noted. For instance, he too brings up the common argument that since all Achaemenid inscriptions fail to name Zoroaster, it is likely that they were not Zoroastrians.[29] He counters that this is no different than a medieval king failing to mention Paul and the Apostles when thanking God and Mary for a victory, which is a valid, although weaker, counter-argument than Jong's above since it does not take into account that later Persian Zoroastrians did not name Zoroaster in their inscriptions.[30] He also mentions that Achaemenid inscriptions use the non-Avestan term '*baga*' in reference to divinity, but fails to recognise, as does Mary Boyce, the weakness of this as an argument for the Achaemenids not being Zoroastrians, since the Zoroastrian Sassanids used the same term themselves.[31] Ultimately though, Duchesne-Guillemin concludes that the

[23] Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, La religion de l'Iran ancien (Paris, France, 1962), 221.
[24] *Ibid*., The Western Response to Zoroaster (London, England, 1958), 52.
[25] *Ibid*., 53.
[26] Herodotus, 1.140, 7.19, 7.113-114.
[27] Strouvé, 542.
[28] Jong, 339.
[29] Duchesne-Guillemin, The Western Response to Zoroaster, 53.
[30] *Ibid*.
[31] *Ibid*., 54; Boyce, 56.

Achaemenids were actually Zoroastrians "in their own way."[32] It should be noted that his claim that the Achaemenids were Zoroastrians 'in their own way' reveals much about Duchesne-Guillemin's definition of Zoroastrianism, for he claims that the 'differences' between Achaemenid religion and Zoroastrianism discussed are partially the result of adaptations by Darius.[33] As a similar phrase was shown to do for Strouvé above, this reveals that Duchesne-Guillemin is using another 'narrow' definition of Zoroastrianism in which there is some form of orthodoxy from which one might deviate. Duchesne-Guillemin's study can be shown to share other features of the 'approaches' criticised by Jong as well, specifically the fragmentising approach, for not only does he focus on the Gathas when citing Zoroastrian texts, but he furthers his study of them through the use of Vedic material and Indo-European scholarship such as that of Dumézil.[34] Ultimately, Duchesne-Guillemin's conclusion that the Achaemenids were Zoroastrians 'in their own way' is convincing, but not completely through his own arguments, as will be seen further below.

In his book *Persia and the Greeks: The Defence of the West, c. 546-478 B.C.*, A. R. Burn also considers the question of Achaemenid religion. He begins by noting that features of Achaemenid rule, such as attention to agriculture, are in accord with Zoroastrian teachings.[35] He then discusses Herodotus' description of Persian religion, and unlike Duchesne-Guillemin he recognises that it appears to be describing Zoroastrianism.[36] For instance, he notices that the account of the Magi's practice of zealously killing certain animals appears to be a description of *khrafstra*-killing (although he does not use this term himself), adding that Herodotus states that the dog, an animal which in Zoroastrianism is under the protection of Ahura Mazda and not to be killed as though a *khrafstra*, is not killed by them.[37] Furthermore, he speculates that Herodotus' description of the difference between the funerary practices of the Magi and of the Persian population in general is simply due to a different degree of observance, for whilst the Magi adhere strictly to the Zoroastrian religious prohibition against contaminating the elements with a corpse, the general populace, including their Achaemenid rulers, consider the prohibition to be sufficiently observed by coating the body in wax before it is buried.[38] He eventually addresses the question of the role of Zoroastrianism in Achaemenid religion directly, stating that the Achaemenids were, as seen above, Zoroastrians of a somewhat 'lax' kind.[39] He elaborates this in his examinations of Darius and Xerxes. For instance, he argues that Darius was not an 'orthodox' Zoroastrian, as seen by his rebuilding of temples destroyed by the more devout Magi when they briefly seized power.[40] He goes on to mention the trouble of Darius' use of the term '*baga*' described above, without noting its identical Sassanid usage, and to describe the absence of Zoroaster's name from Persian inscriptions, but to dismiss this difficulty with essentially the same lacklustre counter-argument used by Duchesne-Guillemin; he concludes not only that Darius was not a 'strict' Zoroastrian but also that it is not even that useful to associate

[32] Duchesne-Guillemin, The Western Response to Zoroaster, 54-57.
[33] *Ibid*., 57.
[34] *Ibid*., 38-51. This entire discussion demonstrates his use of Dumézil's theories and Vedic material.
[35] A. R. Burn, Persia and the Greeks: The Defence of the West, c. 546-478 B.C., 2nd ed. (Stanford, California, 1984), 63.
[36] *Ibid*., 66-67.
[37] *Ibid*.
[38] *Ibid*., 67-68.
[39] *Ibid*., 80.
[40] *Ibid*., 91.

him with Zoroaster.[41] Similarly, he argues that Xerxes was no more of a 'fully consistent' Zoroastrian than Darius, although his declaration that he commanded the use of 'proper rite' in the worship of Ahura Mazda indicates that he adhered to a form of Zoroastrianism which deviated from the orthodox.[42]

It is clear that Burn's answer to the question of whether or not the Achaemenids were Zoroastrians is also entirely dependent upon the existence of an 'orthodox' variety of Zoroastrianism, for he considers Achaemenid religion to be a heterodox variation lacking in strictness. Indeed, all the scholars examined thus far have used such a 'narrow' definition of Zoroastrianism that assumes the existence of a Zoroastrian orthodoxy. Yet as is clear from Jong's criticism of this notion, such an assumption is not universal. Indeed, the 'question' of Achaemenid religion largely disintegrates when one does not assume the existence of Zoroastrian orthodoxy in the Achaemenid era. For instance, the late Mary Boyce came close to rejecting the concept of a Zoroastrian orthodoxy during the reign of the Achaemenids. She addresses the question of Achaemenid religion in *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. She begins her discussion by considering the religion of Cyrus II, noting that not only did he apparently have what looks like a Zoroastrian fire-alter at his palace at Pasargadae, but that he apparently gave his daughter, Atossa, a name with Zoroastrian significance.[43] Considering his tomb, Boyce notes that although it does not appear to be in accordance with Zoroastrian orthodoxy to be so entombed, it is not an indication that Cyrus was not a good Zoroastrian; she elaborates that since the Persian kings were so entombed throughout the Achaemenid period and even within the Sassanid period, it is likely that the Achaemenids set a precedent for their successors by placing themselves above the 'religious law.'[44] Furthermore, she argues that they had Zoroastrian concerns in doing this, for the preservation of the king's body may have been for the sake of allowing his protective spirit to remain with his people; additionally, tombs such as those of Cyrus and Darius appear to have been designed according to Zoroastrian principles.[45] Boyce considers much other evidence both for and against the argument that Achaemenid religion was Zoroastrian which cannot be examined in detail here, such as the absence of Zoroaster's name from Achaemenid inscriptions (which she refutes as an argument for Achaemenid religion not being Zoroastrian, for like Jong she recognises that the Sassanids did not name him in their extant inscriptions either) and the *khrafstra*-killing practised by the Magi in Herodotus.[46]

Boyce is noteworthy here not so much in that she ultimately considers the Achaemenids and the Magi to be Zoroastrians, and that unlike Duchesne-Guillemin she does so for good reasons, but that in discussing the royal tombs she recognises the ability of the Achaemenid kings to deviate from the Zoroastrian 'orthodoxy' for good Zoroastrian reasons. This is illuminating when considered in light of her claim that the Magi were probably organised into largely autonomous groups like the satrapies under the king, for this implies that these groups of Magi also retained their own local customs.[47] The larger implication of this is that despite her references to an 'orthodox' Zoroastrianism, there is, as Jong claims,

[41] *Ibid*., 118.
[42] *Ibid*., 316.
[43] Boyce, 51.
[44] *Ibid*., 52.
[45] *Ibid*., 52-53, 58-59.
[46] *Ibid*., 56-57, 76.
[47] *Ibid*., 66.

"no indication that other versions were considered heterodox."[48] Boyce is using a much less 'narrow' definition of Zoroastrianism than Strouvé, Duchesne-Guillemin, and Burn; as such, her approach may be closer to the 'diversifying' in this respect. A similar view appears to be defended by Kingsley, who claims that in the Achaemenid era there were important Zoroastrian theological issues in which there was no general orthodox position, but instead a mixture of considerably different views held at different times.[49] The position that there was no unchanging and universal orthodox core of Zoroastrianism, Jong's 'diversifying' view, will be adopted here on account of the strengths of the arguments associated with it discussed above. As such, 'Achaemenid religion' will be taken to refer to some form of Zoroastrianism, and the Magi of the Achaemenid era will be considered Zoroastrians.

Having established the Zoroastrian nature of the 'Achaemenid religion' which influenced Greek religion, the means by which it did so should now be briefly considered before the specific influences are themselves examined. Charles H. Khan's warning should be considered from the outset: in comparative studies seeking to identify the influences of one culture upon another, the tendency to seek an explanation of how the influence occurred can result in the creation of 'historical fiction.'[50] Khan is responding to M. L. West in his work *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, in which West proposes that as a result of the Persian conquest of Media, many Magi fled west to Greece, bringing with them their teachings at a time when the Greeks were rather receptive to them intellectually, with the result that Presocratic philosophy bears the mark of Magian doctrine; Khan is right to note that the weakness of this theory is that there is no actual evidence for it.[51] To quite an extent the specific means of the influence of Achaemenid religion upon the Greeks are a matter of pure speculation, based on what little is known as fact: that Persia conquered Asia Minor and that Persians thereby came into contact with the Greeks. However, it may still be possible to safely elaborate on this. West's argument that the Persian influence was largely the result of the Magi in *some* way is not far fetched, given that the Magi were the ones controlling the religious knowledge which was apparently spread to the Greeks, and that they were recognised for this by Greek writers.[52] Furthermore, following Boyce, Kingsley has claimed that there were many Magi travelling beyond the Persian frontier both in search of knowledge and for the sake of teaching others.[53] Indeed, Herodotus notes that the Magi are quite open with regards to their burial practices, which indicates at a bare minimum that they were willing to discuss their customs, and could also indicate that they actively taught others about them.[54] Kingsley has noted that one clear result of the spreading of the Magi's teachings can be seen in Xanthus' report that Xerxes' crossed the Hellespont six thousand years after Zoroaster's lifetime; for this is a dating of great Magian signifi-

[48] Jong, 63.
[49] Kingsley, "Meetings with Magi," 192.
[50] Charles H. Khan, The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary (Cambridge, England, 1979), 299-300.
[51] *Ibid*.; M. L. West, Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient (London, England, 1971), 240-242. It should be noted that West's theory is interesting in its significant consideration of the dynamic of Greek receptivity to foreign intellectual influences. Margaret C. Miller, who has criticised explanations of cultural exchange based on the idea of an imbalance of power, advocates this kind of framework which emphasises the recipient of cultural influence instead. See also Margaret C. Miller, Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century BC: A Study in Cultural Receptivity (Cambridge, England, 1997), 243-244.
[52] West, 240.
[53] Herodotus, 1.140.
[54] Lund, 43.

cance and apparently a result of Magian propaganda of his Saoshyant mission.[55] Therefore, it is the influence of Achaemenid religion through the Magi that is most likely to explain apparent influences on Greek religion through Zoroastrian doctrines, however these influences might have specifically occurred.

Concerning the particular influences of Achaemenid religion on Greek religion, some occurred within the domain of what might usually be considered to be Greek religiosity, besides those which occurred within Presocratic philosophy. Burkert relates some examples of these influences in *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture*. One simple but almost certain influence can be seen at the Artemisium at Ephesus, where the high priest was known by the title of 'Megabyxos,' which is a Persian theophoric name; Burkert speculates that the Greek priests of the temple used this title in order to communicate the shrine's sanctity to the Persians in Persian terms, thereby securing their own sacred rights.[56] Yet this is only a minor example of Persian religious influence on the Greeks, for if this name were not theophoric there would be no way in which any of this would really have to do with Persian religion. However, Burkert also presents some stronger cases of Persian religious influence on Greek religion, such as the possibility that the promise of celestial immortality which began to appear in Greek religion in the 5th century was the result of Zoroastrian lore brought by the Magi.[57]

This brings Burkert to consider the influence of Achaemenid religion on Presocratic philosophy, especially the philosophy of Anaximander. Burkert argues that Anaximander's model of the cosmos, in which next to the earth is the wheel of the stars, then that of the moon, then that of the sun, which is all enclosed by the 'divine Infinite,' mirrors the Zoroastrian model of the steps of the heavenly ascent of the soul, which ascends first to the stars, then to the moon, then to the sun, and then to Ahura Mazda. One might object that this could simply be a coincidence; in his earlier comparative work *Greece and Babylon: A Comparative Sketch of Mesopotamian, Anatolian and Hellenic Religions*, Lewis R. Farnell cautions that comparative approaches to the study of cultural influences could postulate influence where in reality there is only coincidence.[58] Yet Burkert suggests that the Zoroastrian appearance of Anaximander's model is not a mere coincidence, for its unusual placement of the stars as closest to earth defies empirical observation and suggests that Anaximander not only based this model upon an existing source, but also that this source was religious in nature.[59] As such, this is a possible specific instance of Achaemenid religious influence upon Presocratic philosophy.

A full treatment of all the possible Achaemenid religious influences on all the Presocratics is obviously impossible in this space, and therefore the remaining discussion will focus on only some of the possible influences on one of the Presocratics. In Antiquity Clement claimed that Heraclitus utilised

[55] Kingsley, "Meetings with Magi," 191-194.
[56] Burkert, 105-107.
[57] *Ibid*., 110-113. Note Burkert's rejection of the use of the later Pahlavi texts to study earlier Achaemenid Zoroastrianism. Although this is characteristic of Jong's 'fragmentising' approach, Burkert does not make great use of Vedic material in place of these texts. However, since he is not dealing directly with the question of Achaemenid religion here, it is not really clear which of Jong's approaches best describes Burkert's, if one does so to begin with.
[58] Lewis R. Farnell, Greece and Babylon: A Comparative Sketch of Mesopotamian, Anatolian and Hellenic Religions (Edinburgh, Scotland, 1911), 37.
[59] Delev, 389.

'barbarian philosophy,' which may likely be a reference to Achaemenid religious doctrines, given the proximity of Achaemenid Persia to the Ephesian.[60] West has considered many of the possible instances of Zoroastrian influence on Heraclitus. For instance, he examines his concept of the sun as a bowl of fire, noting that this is the kind of observation one might make if comparing it to the fire on a Zoroastrian fire-altar of the Magi, on which the burning fire symbolises the sun; the implication is that this might be an example of Persian religious influence upon the Greek philosophy of Heraclitus.[61] West also compares Herodotus' unusual (from a Greek perspective) statement that corpses are to be discarded as abominations with the similar Magian doctrine seen in Herodotus – that corpses are so polluted that they must be exposed rather than buried or cremated, as this would contaminate the elements.[62] Implying that following Heraclitus would lead to the exposure of corpses, for a reason similar to that of the Magi, West once again suggests that Heraclitus may have been influenced by Achaemenid religion in formulating this particular 'doctrine.'[63] It should be noted that despite implying many such influences, West cautions against the over-interpretation of such comparative evidence. For example, although he notes that Hades plays a similar role to Angra Mainyu in Heraclitus' philosophy, and that he was indeed identified by the Greeks with Hades as his brother was with Zeus, West warns his reader that he is not proposing that Heraclitus considered Zeus and Hades to be engaged in a cosmic war such as that of Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu.[64] Khan's criticism of West's arguments has already been noted above, as have other concerns about comparativism in general. However, the importance of such methods should also be recognised, especially when conducted carefully in the context of cultures that might actually be influencing one another. Jong has noted that the Greeks were clearly interested in 'Oriental wisdom,' and that this sometimes indeed led to their adaptation of such foreign doctrines.[65] By recognising a Zoroastrian element in Heraclitus' 'obscure' philosophy, one is clearly able to make better sense of it, as in the case of Empedocles, described above, who is best understood within a broader magical context typically considered to be outside the domain of Presocratic philosophy.

Even if one is sceptical, it is clear that there is some possibility that Presocratic philosophers such as Heraclitus were influenced by Zoroastrianism. This places them within the larger context of Achaemenid religious influence (which can reasonably be taken to be both Zoroastrian and Magian) upon Greek religion. To establish greater certainty in regards to specific examples of Achaemenid in-

[60] Burkert, 113-114.
[61] West, 175-176.
[62] *Ibid.*, 184.
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*, 188-189.
[65] Jong, 38.

fluences on Greek religion further study of the Zoroastrian texts is required, for interpretations of these texts may vary and thereby affect any comparative study of both Zoroastrianism and Greek religious doctrines and philosophies.

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